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NEWS LETTER

OCTOBER 1947

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# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

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(THE COVER STILL ON THIS ISSUE COMES FROM THE DANISH FILM *THE SEVENTH AGE*)

## THE IMPORT TAX

THE complete failure of certain sections of the Industry, and of the Trade Press in particular, to take even a moderately sober view of the 75 per cent tax on foreign films, has only been partially offset by the statesmanlike attitude of the BFPA. Otherwise the Trade seems to have been bent on confirming the accusations of its most violent critics that it is largely a tool of American finance anyway.

The plain fact is that hysterical screams about the disaster which is about to overtake the British public in the form of closed movie-houses are both stupid and pointless. It is probably not true to say that people won't go to revivals of films; on the contrary, a large number have been revived, and successfully, during the past years. A little ingenuity and showmanship could work wonders—for instance, a Hitchcock repertory season. Meantime one notes that Britain's largest cinema has just had a week of live ballet, and been packed out. Dare one wonder whether the public would mind all that much if there weren't any films after all? The cinema is quite a mild drug, and enforced abstention from it is not likely to be even as irritating as abstention from smoking. At present, in any case, general opinion seems to be that the Americans will not cease to send films here, if only for the reason that in a market which has always shown a clear profit (to the extent of determining financial policy as regards production costs) they will, in the end, take 25 per cent if they can't get 100 per cent; in other words, £4,000,000 a year is better than nothing. While British production cannot at this stage expect to be able to fill what in any case will be a bigish gap, there is no doubt that annual output can go up pretty considerably if inflated budget pictures are abandoned, if the working tempo of British film production is stepped-up (a psychological as well as a technical matter), and if something is done to encourage the documentary and short-film people by providing some expectation of a reasonable financial return on production. A single feature programme will, of course, be necessary; and although the

Bernstein questionnaire showed a large majority in favour of the double feature, there is no reason to suppose that people will not quickly get used to the other, always providing that the supporting programme consists (as it certainly does not today) of good quality stuff. All these factors mean that the imminent issue of the Government White Paper on the new Cinematograph Films Bill is of the greatest importance, even if the idea of Quota sounds, under immediate circumstances, a little incongruous. Financially and economically, there is every justification for the Import Tax, and the average citizen will in the end prefer to find Spam in the tin rather than Carmen Miranda. But this justification should not blind us to the real disadvantages of the tax. Films carry ideas, and a tax on foreign films is a tax on the interchange of ideas. The tax is aimed at America only; but it hits equally hard the import of films from other countries. It may be said that films from France, Sweden, Denmark or Italy impinge little enough on the general film-going public, and that their total cessation would not matter. The reply to this is that the best of the European films have an influence on public taste out of all proportion to their audiences; not least do they influence the technicians who make British films. Also it must be remembered that one of the main reasons why European films are not more widely shown here is the determination of the US-influenced section of the Trade that they shall not be shown. Had it been possible to encourage the entry of European films while taxing the entry of US films, the general audiences in this country—after a period of resistance no doubt—would have benefited a great deal. But it must not be forgotten that the tax on ideas applies with equal force to the best of Hollywood production too. Deprived of this best, we should miss something really valuable, and not least the link of ordinary understanding between peoples which the film, and the US film especially, can, at its finest, so vividly and cogently supply.



# UNESCO REPORTS

By

SINCLAIR ROAD

'UNESCO should as a first and pressing measure appoint three Commissions on Immediate Technical Needs, to examine the requirements of those countries, particularly in Europe and the Far East, where the war has caused serious loss of equipment and personnel, or where rehabilitation and reconstruction are affected by inadequate technical knowledge and facilities.'

The first step in constructing the defences of peace was to put the instruments of education back into the hands of the people of Europe and the Far East. Accordingly the first General Conference in Paris instructed UNESCO to survey the main requirements. Executive Committees went to work, commissions were appointed, and teams of research workers sent out in the early part of this year to the twelve countries selected for immediate investigation. By the end of August, reports were ready, summarizing the technical Press, radio and film needs of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Greece, China and the Philippines. Conferences have since been held to consider the findings and to make detailed practical recommendations. One of UNESCO's projects for 1947 has been completed. The report on film needs is concise, factual and unique. Apart from meeting the immediate aim of assessing the technical deficiencies of a number of countries, the report does several other jobs. It was also designed to serve another part of the Mass Communication programme which is concerned with removing obstacles to the free flow of information, such as quotas, tariffs and censorship regulations. The material finally collected gives, therefore, the first accurate picture of the rise and development of the film medium in the countries surveyed. Up to now the main source of information about world film activities has been the Motion Picture Section of the US Department of Commerce, which has in turn depended for its intelligence on Hollywood. Its publications are useful though, in reality, they are little more than rough and ready assessments of the marketing prospects for American films. The UNESCO report is of quite a different calibre and with it UNESCO's film department has at least established itself as a world centre for film information.

The key to the whole inquiry is a questionnaire of staggering proportions. Nearly 500 questions were prepared on films alone. This was the basis on which the research teams collected their information. The final result is a testimony of thorough and willing co-operation between those who asked and those who answered.

It is impossible to do the film report justice in so short a space. Very briefly the kind of information obtained is as follows. Full particulars are given of all known projection facilities, 35 mm and 16 mm, sound and silent, mobile and static, commercially operated, installed in schools or used in other ways. Approximate attendance figures at the cinemas are also included. Com-

mercial distribution machinery is described and the percentages of foreign film imports given. It is, therefore, possible to see, for example, the extent to which American domination of the world screens has declined since 1939 and the distribution of British films increased. Production resources are covered in some detail—studios, personnel, finance, technical development, output. Manufacture of raw materials and equipment and facilities for professional training are dealt with under separate headings. Educational films are also considered apart, and it is interesting to note the relatively large place they occupy. A brief sketch is given of the conditions under which the film industry operates in each country, the legislation which has been introduced and in general the importance which is attached to the film medium.

The general impression is of greatly expanded interest in all uses of the film, as revealed by increased cinema attendance and growing official support. We have had first-hand evidence of the zeal of the Czechs, but the report shows just as much urgent attention being given to making and using films in Poland, Norway, Denmark, Yugoslavia and even Luxembourg. Where no contribution can be made in terms of studio-made feature films, because markets or the particular language group are small, there is growing documentary and educational film activity. In the long run the contribution which each country can make to the overall purposes of world education may as a result be even greater, provided there is the willingness and machinery to exchange the films once they are made.

## Currency difficulties

The conclusions which the report comes to summarize the main technical needs. Raw materials—film stock and chemical products—do not present a major problem. Equipment for production and laboratories and for exhibition constitute the principal deficiency. Equipment for exhibition is by far the greater item of expense, and the need is chiefly for 16 mm and film strip projectors which again emphasizes the growing rise of films in education. Nearly all countries have further expressed their need for first-rate educational films from abroad. They want to receive catalogues, but more particularly they are anxious to establish some kind of exchange system to overcome currency difficulties. This is a question which requires some immediate solution if the regular interchange of documentary and educational films is to be effective.

The total needs have been assessed in the report at roughly £5-6 million, of which 10 per cent represents needs for the development of educational film production and for exhibition equipment of all types. Expressed in terms of countries China accounts for more than half the needs,

and China, Greece and Poland together for 90 per cent.

## Equipment and Personnel

The report and its findings have in turn been vetted by a further Sub-Commission which has added its own recommendations. The Sub-Commission is of the opinion that world production capacity for black-and-white film stock, for chemicals and for equipment is sufficient to meet all needs, although it foresees continuing delays in the delivery of certain types of equipment. The problem of how countries are to obtain foreign exchange for their purchases is the subject of a further section in the Sub-Commission's recommendations. The creation of a special UNESCO fund is proposed to assist in re-equipping the Press, radio and film industries in war-devastated countries, and also the flotation of loans. Both proposals will be put before the next General Conference of UNESCO.

The Sub-Commission stresses the greatly extended use of 16 mm sound projectors for public film shows and the advantages, not the least being the smaller costs as compared with the use of 35 mm projectors. In passing it also notes a feeling in some countries that there will be strong technical reasons for the adoption of 17.5 mm instead of 16 mm for sub-standard equipment. It recommends UNESCO to investigate.

All countries need trained personnel; both more people and people with higher qualifications and wider experience. This is rightly put as a priority requirement. Interchange of personnel and of whole units and scholarships by the more fortunate countries—a scheme which UNESCO has already pioneered—can provide some of the answers. But let us not be too smug about this. At least two of the countries surveyed already operate proper training schemes of their own. It is time we hurried on with training plans for our own industry in Britain.

The Sub-Commission recommends that UNESCO should act as an International Clearing House of Information on films, a recommendation which is anticipated by the very fact and excellence of the report itself.

There is a further proposal that UNESCO should maintain a Reference Film Library of selected films as a kind of shop window to simplify the job of choosing and viewing films. Action by UNESCO is also proposed to develop the exchange of educational films between countries without currency passing between them, and exemption of educational films and equipment from import-tax.

## Decision next month

In November the second General Conference of UNESCO takes place in Mexico City. The recommendations made by the Commission on

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**FIRST  
INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL  
OF  
DOCUMENTARY  
FILMS**

*'Plato said it was in-harmony—in the learning of harmony, in the pursuit of harmony—that one could find the basis of justice and the basis of the good life. All art is a state of harmony and its form is the achievement of harmony. Its substance is concerned with all that breaks up harmony.'*

*In that respect the arts have much of great practicality to give today. It is in the sight of man's achievements as literature presents them that we fire our will. It is in man's mind—at work, in difficulty and suffering, but still maintaining his great progress—that we find our inspiration for the future.*

*Documentary has a very specific part to play in this inspiration and in this work. It is an art, it is a public service, and it is an educational instrument. It is one of the few arts that has these three elements. It is a mirror held up to nature, but also it is a hammer shaping the future.'*

*(Excerpt from John Grierson's speech at the opening performance of the Festival)*

The Edinburgh Festival demands much more than a casual notice. Our press date made it impossible to do justice to Scotland's initiative in this issue. Early in November we hope to bring out a special issue.

**TILL THEN WE SAY  
THANK YOU, SCOTLAND**

*(Continued from page 134)*

Technical Needs will come up for approval by the member nations present. They must decide whether the lines of action proposed for re-equipping the film industries of Europe and the Far East are to be implemented. The value of the further surveys to which UNESCO is already committed will depend on the degree of willing co-operation shown at Mexico City. To prepare a plan of action, however excellent the plan, is pointless unless action can be taken. The recent FAO Conference in Geneva is a depressing example of the way in which self-interest and stupidity are impeding world reconstruction.

The fate of world plans does not, however,

depend only on the decisions of official conferences. UNESCO's report is not the responsibility of the delegates at Mexico City alone. It is a document which demands attention in every country and in all quarters where there is genuine interest in developing the use of the film. It is our responsibility in Britain to consider what can be done to bring foreign technicians to this country to study, to send film units abroad to work with local groups, to develop the two-way exchange with other countries of films of all types and relevant information.

A start has been made on all these fronts. The Edinburgh Film Festival brought together for

the first time a representative collection of world documentaries. In Brussels last July the basis of an organization of documentary film workers was laid in the World Union of Documentary. In Paris in October the Scientific Film Association is participating in a congress to establish an international scientific film body. At the recent International Conference of Film Trade Unions in Czechoslovakia similar problems were discussed. There is, both nationally and internationally, the machinery to support every one of the recommendations in the UNESCO report. It is for us to take the lead which has been so ably given.



# SURVEY OF FILM IN FRANCE, BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG

'UNESCO Reports' gives a general picture of the scope and principal recommendations of the Commission of Technical Needs. In the first year the Commission has surveyed film developments in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, China, and the Philippines. The information collected is unique and should be widely available. DNL is proposing to summarize the main findings in a series of articles. A beginning is made in this issue with France, Belgium and Luxembourg

## FRANCE

Since the liberation the French Government has adopted a constructive policy towards the film. In October, 1946, a National Cinematographic Centre (Centre National de Cinématographie) was set up under the control of the Ministry of Youth, Arts and Letters. The Director-General of the Centre is assisted by an Advisory Council representing both sides of the industry, and by an Administrative Committee representing eight Ministries. The Centre derives its funds from State subsidies and contributions from professional organizations.

The functions of the Centre are as follows:

- to examine draft laws, and decrees;
- to co-ordinate all branches of the industry, to arrange modernization and development, to collect statistics, to arbitrate in disputes;
- to supervise financial arrangements and the proceeds of films;
- to grant loans or subsidies to producers;
- to distribute documentary films and develop the non-commercial side of the industry, to organize national and international exhibitions;
- to arrange professional training;
- to co-ordinate social work in the industry.

Although the French Government has stopped well short of nationalization, the Centre nevertheless occupies in principle a controlling position in the industry.

## Exhibition

Despite the fact that several hundred cinemas were damaged or destroyed during the war, cinema facilities are greater than in 1939. The number of cinemas operating on March 1st, 1947, was as follows:

Commercial exhibition	35mm	16mm
Cinemas	4,913	1,171
Travelling cinemas	149	4,164
Film Guilds		
Cinemas	442	—
Travelling cinemas	—	1,891

The main increase has therefore been in the 16mm field. Cinemas attendances show a corresponding increase. The weekly attendance figure in 1946 was just over 9 million, one million of these being at 16mm shows. Although this figure is still well below the 25-30 million recorded in Britain, it is three million above the pre-war figure for France. Actual receipts, however, continue to be small. It has been estimated elsewhere that the present gross box-office takings are only 6,000 million francs a year (i.e. about £12 million), which is one of the factors contributing

to the present financial crisis besetting the French film industry.

Two other points are worth noting about the exhibiting side of the business. The circuit system is very little developed in France. The biggest of the three main circuits operates a total of 37 cinemas only, a great difference from the mammoth British combines. Moreover, all cinema programmes must, by a law of October, 1940, include only one long film of more than 1,200 metres, in other words the single feature programme is the order of the day.

## Distribution

There are a large number of distributing companies, 90 operating in Paris. All the big American companies have their agencies and also the British Eagle-Lion. The entry of foreign films is controlled by legislation. All cinema programmes must show French films at least four weeks out of every twelve. This is one of the conditions laid down by the Franco-American agreement of May, 1946, by which the French film industry was 'blum-byrned' and brought to its present catastrophic state.

The films shown in French cinemas are increasingly of American origin. Of films released in Paris in 1946 the following were the countries of origin:

	per cent
America .. .. .	46
France .. .. .	41
England .. .. .	8
USSR .. .. .	2.5
Other countries .. .. .	2.5

American films are also obtaining an increasing percentage of box-office receipts. Today the figure is 50-55 per cent of the total as compared with 35-40 per cent pre-war. The number of British films shown has also risen, but still does not constitute an important factor. France remains tied to Hollywood.

## Production

France emerged from the war with most of its film production resources intact. Today it has 15 studios with 44 stages in use, and there are a large number of production companies of all types. In 1946, 94 long feature films were produced and about 150 to 200 documentaries, shorts and cartoons. This year, however, the conditions of the Franco-American agreement are beginning to take their toll. Estimated feature production is down to 45. Government finance is available to producers in the form of loans or subsidy, but this alone is of no avail. A draft resolution has recently been submitted to the

Second Assembly calling upon the Government to take drastic action to save the industry in its present plight. Already in 1946 French producers made a loss of 1,000 million francs, while production costs are up ten times on the 1939 figures. Since then the situation has become worse and the industry is threatened with complete collapse and the unemployment of its skilled technicians. The resolution put up to the Government proposes cuts in the taxes levied on the industry, more loans to the best French producers, increased exports of French films and above all a revision of the disastrous agreement which Blum negotiated with America. The film industry has been incorporated in the Monnet plan for the reconstruction of French economy and it is to be hoped that some positive action can and will be taken.

## Films and Education

The UNESCO Report also gives details of the equipment situation in France and also of training facilities, but the other main section deals with the educational film position.

Since 1914 the French Government has taken an active interest in the use of films in education. A central library of films has been in existence at the Musée Pédagogique since 1920. Today it contains some 400 films, three-quarters of which are silent. In French schools there are about 5,000 35mm silent projectors and between 600 and 800 16mm sound and silent machines.

In 1944 a committee on educational cinema was set up to study and promote this use of the film. It is hoped ultimately to expand the library to include some 2,000 films and to install 100,000 projectors, preferably 16mm sound. This development is envisaged as part of the Monnet Plan and is estimated to cost 11,000 million francs, spread over ten years. The committee is to be responsible for vetting subjects for educational films, relying on the Centre National to arrange production, under teacher supervision and in co-operation with private companies. In principle the machinery set up has much in common with what has been planned in Britain. The use of foreign films is also envisaged, if they can be obtained on some kind of exchange basis. This is a point which our own Ministry of Education should go into as soon as possible.

Tribute is also paid in the UNESCO Report to the pioneering work of Jean Painlevé at the 'Institut de cinématographie scientifique' in the field of scientific film, and to the 'Cinémathèque Française' for its work in collecting films and documents dealing with the art of the film. The expansion of film societies is also an important factor in French film life. The 'Fédéra-



tion Française des Ciné-Clubs' now has about 120,000 members. A committee on films for children has also been formed recently to study the production and distribution of such films and to pull together the various efforts being made in that direction.

## BELGIUM

The film position in Belgium is different in several important respects. Cinema attendance is quite high in proportion to population (the weekly figure is around three million), and there are 1,200 35mm cinemas and about 350 equipped for 16mm shows. On the other hand Belgium produces hardly any feature films of its own; the figure for 1945 was five only and for 1946 even less. The Belgian cinemas therefore depend almost exclusively on foreign products. The percentages of all films shown in 1946, according to country of origin, is roughly as follows:

US, 67%; France, 25%; England, 6%; Others, 2%.

Like most of the countries in Western Europe Belgium continues to depend to a very large extent on America. There appear to be no restrictions operated by the Belgian Government against the importation of foreign films. In fact, Government action is limited to censorship and to the development of educational film activity. No information is available about documentary film production. This is an unfortunate gap, since this is the field in which many of the smaller countries are finding that they can make an important contribution. The absence of Government initiative may be one explanation.

## Educational Films

The Belgian Ministry of Education has a Cinema Section formed in 1946 and responsible for developing the use of films and film strips. Unfortunately its library of films and all its files were destroyed by fire this year. The service had therefore to begin from scratch. Its functions cover the whole range from purchase of equipment, production and distribution of educational films to the supply of information. No exact information is available as to the number of projectors in schools, but they are said to be

adequate for present needs. A non-profit-making company, 'Institut National de Cinématographie Scientifique', has also been formed to produce films for universities.

## LUXEMBOURG

UNESCO has not forgotten Luxembourg. Tiny, with no production studios and only 29 cinemas, the Grand Duchy nevertheless has an Educational Film Office and is seriously concerned with the problem of using films in schools. Only 45 silent projectors were left in use after the war, but there are plans to increase the number. The Office operates a library which contains 370 subjects and is already producing educational films of its own. Once again the position of Luxembourg

underlines the need for an international exchange system for educational films. Other countries should take note.

## Calling Film Societies

According to a Report in the *Daily Herald* (of September 23rd) the Kinematograph Renters' Society has decided that Film Societies are becoming 'a threat to exhibitor interests'.

We would like to draw the attention of Film Society members to this rather astonishing announcement and we invite them to let us know what they think.

Do they feel that they are a threat? Or could it be that the boot is on the other foot?

Opinions, please!

## THE MILLER'S AIM

We feel that our readers may be interested in the following extract from an article in *Vorwärts*—a paper published in the Russian Sector of Berlin.

We print it as it stands, with the original title and point out that it is written by a German for German consumption.

As usual, we remind readers that the views expressed in any article or extract do not necessarily coincide with the opinions of the Editorial Board.

IN ENGLAND there is a special type of Miller. We mean a mill-owner and not a man called Mr Miller. The name of this mill-owner is J. Arthur RANK. He is of a special type because in the first place he is the owner of very many, very big mills—so to say—a 'monopolist-miller'.

The second reason for being outstanding is that Mr Rank developed an early liking for the cinema. Being a man of means, he at first afforded himself the luxury of a few cinemas and later of many.

In the course of time film studios, film distribution agencies and other branches of the film industry were added. Today things have reached the state that you can hardly enter a cinema in London which is not Mr Rank's property. It is just the same in the English provinces. However,

if you did happen to find an independent suburban cinema somewhere, you may rest assured that the film you would see had been made in Mr Rank's studios.

Of course, all this is frightfully democratic. You may be certain that Mr Rank has a completely open mind and that his pictures faithfully reproduce his political convictions.

## Negotiations

We would never have started to talk about Mr Rank had it not been for the fact that this flour producer first of all interested himself in the German filmgoer.

According to the English *Sunday Chronicle*, he has for some considerable number of months kept a team of research men in Germany to study current conditions.

Now the agents of Mr Rank have proposed a plan to the British Control Commission for the taking over of UFA, in which the exploitation of Rank's films in Germany would promote the birth of a new democracy in Germany.

Should we Germans be asked for our unbiased opinion, then we could only answer that we did not envisage the new democracy meaning that Hugenberg's monopoly could be replaced by Rank's monopoly.

FRANK

## CROOKS

THE STRICT laws of libel in this country are not infrequently a matter of editorial regret, and never more so than in dealing with the so-called 'producers' of the quickie shorts and featurettes which are currently tending to bring the name of documentary into disrepute amongst the cinema-going public. Originally these quickies, however much one may have objected to them, were not necessarily matters of dishonesty. The provisions of the Films Act, and the impossibility of getting adequate receipts from theatrical distribution, made the production of these films, costing as little as from £150 to £600, almost inevitable. Recently however this shoddy field of film-making has taken on a more sinister aspect. Quickie producers have noted that documentaries are usually sponsored films. Taking a leaf out of the documentary book, they have begun to turn more than a few dishonest pennies by sponsor-swindling on quite a big scale. This is how they do it. They approach an industrial or commercial firm and spin a long story about the enormous public which can be reached through the public cinemas, at a cost to the sponsor no greater than a few big adverts in the national dailies, and with an audience far greater than the readership of the newspapers. They add, though not of course in writing, that they can get good theatrical distribution. It

is extraordinary by the way how otherwise hard-headed businessmen fall for this sort of guff. The producer then quotes a production cost of £1,500 or more. When he gets the contract he makes the film for as little as £600. The film having been finished, the sponsor naturally starts to agitate about distribution; but *he has nothing in writing*. The producer spills all the old tricks of the trade—altered market conditions and whatnot—and eventually offers to make a special effort to get the film into the cinemas. He then takes it personally to a renter who offers say, £350 for all distribution rights. This the producer pockets. His clear profit on the deal is in the neighbourhood of £1,200. The basic result is that the public is tormented yet again by a crapulous film of no merit whatever, the sponsor vows never to engage in films again, and, because the word documentary is as often as not impertinently attached to these productions, a totally false and deleterious impression about the factual film starts to get around. The only things which are satisfied in the whole episode are the producer, who can live in luxury at an expensive West End hotel as long as there are still suckers (and you know how often they are born); and, of course, the exhibitor's quota, which is why something drastic must be done about the whole situation in framing the new Films Bill.



*This article was written as an Introduction to a Catalogue of Danish Films*

## DENMARK AND FILM

By

ARTHUR ELTON

DENMARK has made a contribution to the art of the film out of all proportion to the four million people who live within her borders. She was one of the earliest European countries to take up film production, and to this day on the Nordisk lot at Valby, near Copenhagen, stands a glass walled and roofed studio built in 1906 when interior scenes had to be illuminated by sunlight.

By the 'twenties, Denmark had become a major European producing centre of silent films. Asta Nielsen and Psilander were making hearts throb faster and breasts heave from Moscow to Madrid. All Europe laughed at Fyrtaarnet and Bivognen (Lighthouse and Tram-trailer), the famous pair of comedians, better known as Pat and Patachon, or Long and Short. It was at this time too, that a young journalist, Carl Theodor Dreyer, was gaining his first experience in films.

When the sound film spread round the world, Denmark was at a disadvantage. Not only was she a small country, but she belonged to one of the smaller language groups. Nevertheless, by rigid economies, she managed to keep her film industry alive and to make about ten feature films each year till the outbreak of World War II.

When I came to Denmark a little time after the liberation, almost the first film I saw was Carl Dreyer's masterly study of witchcraft, *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens Dag*), with its splendid acting and photographic quality and its moving formal stylized dialogue. I thought at the time, and I think still, that this is one of the world's most important contributions to the art of the cinema, to be ranged alongside such films as *Potempkin*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The General*, *Drifters*, *The Covered Wagon*, *Song of Ceylon*, and the *Gold Rush*. Alas, when the film was shown for the first time in Copenhagen, it was almost unanimously condemned by the film critics, and no producing company had wit enough to give Dreyer another film. It was not even sent to the Cannes Festival in 1946, where it would certainly have created a sensation.

### Fine Quality

Only the Danish Government had the wisdom to get Dreyer to work with documentary. It is England's good luck but Denmark's misfortune that Dreyer could only find support for a new feature in London, for a country can ill afford to lose her artists and creators.

Lest it be thought that Dreyer's masterpiece is the result of an individual genius, working outside a tradition and in isolation, at least two other feature films of fine quality have appeared in Denmark in the last eighteen months—*The Red Meadows* (*De Røde Enger*) and *Ditte, Child of the People* (*Ditte Menneskebarn*). The former, directed by Bodi Ipsen and Lau Lauritzen, is a taut workmanlike story of the Danish underground movement. The latter is the first full length feature film to be made by Bjarne Henning-

Jensen, who has trained both as an actor and as a documentary director. Several of his documentary films are listed in this catalogue. *Ditte* is a sensitive and finely observed study of the life of an illegitimate girl on Jutland. It has something of the quality of a novel by Thomas Hardy. Henning-Jensen's documentary sense, combined with his sense of character and situation, has enabled him to make a film both dramatic and full of the sights and sounds of country life. As one watches it, one can almost sniff the wind as it blows in from the North Sea across the Jutland dunes.

Such is the tradition and such are the achievements against which the present collection of one hundred documentary films must be judged.

### Before and during the war

Danish documentary had its beginnings just before the war. Paul Henningsen's long and beautifully photographed *The Film of Denmark*, produced in 1935 was an isolated experiment. By the time of the German invasion, Denmark's only documentary unit, Minerva Film, had only a few films to its credit, though these included some medical films by Axel Lerche, and Theodor Christensen's documentary on the building of the Trans-Iranian railway, sponsored by Kampsex, the Danish film of civil engineers.

When the Germans smashed into Denmark, her film technicians were faced with two alternatives. Should they abandon their screens to the Germans, hand over their film studios and cutting rooms, and allow their film culture to be wiped out? Or should they attempt to hold their industry in their own hands, keeping alive some of the essential qualities of Danish life and ideals? Like their comrades in France and other occupied countries they chose the latter course. The Government decided to help, and two authorities were charged to sponsor documentary films—Dansk-Kulturfilm, a voluntary body supported out of public funds in the form of a tax on cinemas, and Ministerierne Filmudvalg, the Film Committee of the Danish Government. The former approximates to the British Council, the latter to the British Central Office of Information. As in England, the production functions of Dansk Kulturfilm and Ministerierne Filmudvalg have now been merged. Thomas P. Heijle, an educationist closely associated with the Folk High School movement and founder and director of an organization showing stage plays to school children, looked after the film work of the former. Mogens Skot-Hansen, one-time civil servant in the Danish Ministry of Education, became responsible for the films of the latter, under a committee headed by Vilhelm Boas of the Ministry of Justice. Skot-Hansen brought to the films a knowledge of civil service procedure and a sense of public purpose. To these qualities he soon

added first rate technical skill, for he quickly became not only an ingenious script-writer, but also a capable director and film editor, and an expert on non-theatrical distribution. Today he is one of the best documentary producers, and his special qualities have enabled him to find a compromise between the rigid civil service procedure and the creative freedom without which artists cannot flourish. Early in 1947 he joined the film department of UNESCO in Paris to work under John Grierson.

### Similarities

So, when I came to Denmark, I found a documentary school already established with strong and lively traditions of its own. I quickly felt that, even if English documentary could contribute something by pointing to technical and social paths which it might be profitable to explore, my colleagues and I in England had a great deal to learn from Denmark in return.

Before the war, Britain had evolved both the theory and practice of documentary. But in spite of such famous titles as *Drifters*, *Man of Aran*, *Night Mail*, *Housing Problems* and *Song of Ceylon*, British documentary did not become a mature or sizable industry till after 1941, when it became harnessed to the war effort. Danish documentary also reached maturity during the war, and the movements in the two countries, divorced from each other as they were, show remarkable resemblances. Even their differences are complementary.

The war forced both Governments to turn to the film as a method of public information and to sustain public morale. Both Governments adopted the documentary approach, though not in England till after some ludicrous attempts had been made to dish up Rule Britannia as an incentive to go to war. The five-minute film, released free of charge to the public cinemas, was introduced almost simultaneously in the two countries. Both sought to find a workable compromise between the old theory that a civil service administrator and neither interpreters nor creates, and the fact that films, and documentary films in particular, are interpretative and creative or nothing at all.

The differences between the two schools were as striking as their similarities. In England the documentary film became a weapon of offence. Frills and fal-lals were jettisoned. Perhaps with them went things which we could ill afford to do without. Things like humanity and humour. Things which bring that warmth which is essential if there is to be a deep and sympathetic relation between the film maker and his audience. So I still feel pleased when I remember that, in the middle of the war, the Ministry of Food was persuaded not only to accept but to like Len Lye's fantasy on the Woolton pie—*When the Pie was Opened*. I am happy, too, to have been distantly



associated with that chunky untidy Elizabethan masterpiece, *Our Country*. As the war went on, quantity had to be put before quality; content became all important; the message—only too often solidly embodied in the commentary and absent from the visuals—became everything, and for this very reason sometimes failed to come across.

In Denmark, the documentary film became a weapon of defence. Its makers could not present the economic, political and social position as they experienced it. Had they done so, the Gestapo would have killed them. So they were forced often to deal with things of local rather than universal importance. They had to step aside from the realities of the war situation. This had an effect on their work opposite to that in England. If the English films had few frills, the Danish sometimes had too many. If the English films sacrificed form to content, it was sometimes the other way round in Denmark. If English films were often too down-to-earth and even dull, Danish films were sometimes a little too high off the ground.

The film workers in both countries are now seeking to deepen their social approach to their subject matter, to be at once more profound and critical without losing contact with their audiences. Our films must be peopled with characters who laugh, quarrel, make love, marry and beget children. They must have both grace and warmth. It is here that I think England has much to learn from Denmark, and it is for this reason that I want to touch on three particular aspects of Danish documentary films—their technical virtuosity, their humanity and their humour.

When one is with the Danish documentary people, as likely as not they will be discussing the technical side of their craft, the proper timing of a mix, the weight and effectiveness of a cut, the juxtaposition of a word and a visual, the structure and build of a sequence. This love of film for its own sake is something which I admire and respect, though sometimes it can go too far. The consequence has been that, though technically many of the films are superb and achieve a satisfying blend of picture, voice and music that any country may envy, some of them sometimes lapse into virtuosity for its own sake. For example, parts of Bjarne Henning-Jensen's two films, *Paper and Sugar*, suffer in this way, gay, sparkling and brilliantly put together though they be. It is not unjust to say that he has only found his mature style in *Ditte*, *Child of the People*. Again, Søren Melson was capable of making both the charming *Cutter H.71* (though even here the jazz musical accompaniment seems a little strained) and *The Cow* which degenerates into a ballet of blood and offals. Theodor Christensen, one of the ablest film makers in Denmark, is still seeking a reconciliation between his vivid racy impressionism and the requirements of clear and pithy exposition.\* Finally, no note on the technique of Danish films would be complete without a reference to the finely conceived musical compositions accompanying many of them, and to their luminous photography.

Few Danish film directors are content with a mere statement of fact which one may take or leave. They study each new subject as a special problem on its own. They try to express their own point of view towards the theme they are

treating. They seek to make the audience feel as well as understand. They pick out special qualities and exhibit them to the audience, perhaps a fine landscape draped handsomely across the screen or a particular quality of emotion. For this reason, many of the films have point and wit and interest far beyond the bare bones of the subject. Every now and again, of course, there is a failure. Hagen Hasselbalch who has made one of the best films in the whole collection, *Your Grain is in Danger*, sometimes slips his anchors and hits the moon, as in *Pan and the Girl*.

At its best, Danish documentary shows its characters in the round. They are not merely ob-

neck for fear of thieves, and brewing tea on a spirit stove in his hotel bedroom at four o'clock. The makers of those films have not realized that the tourist of today in the main will come from the Study Group, the Youth Club, the Workers Travel Association, the trade union and the technical school. What the new travellers want to know is, what sort of people will they meet? What will they eat? Where will they stay and how much will it cost? What's the dancing like? Is the bathing good? Is there fresh water near the camping sites? I will bet a pound to a penny that Søren Melson's gay, intimate and good-humoured *People's Holiday* will do more to bring people to Denmark than all the spires and towers and landscapes and ruins and castle and historical monuments rolled into a ball and doubled.

## Wit

There is one quality for which Denmark could give points to the documentary schools of England, France, Czechoslovakia, Canada and the USA, and still beat them: wit and humour. Film after film, particularly those tackling propaganda themes, has a neat and witty script, and imaginative presentation. With the exception of some of the British trailers, and the work of Humphrey Jennings, Len Lye, Brian Smith, and D'Arcy Cartwright, I am tempted to think that English documentary is rationed to one laugh and two smiles to every hundred films—and they don't always take up the ration at that. The Danish films scintillate with gaiety and humour. Once seen, one does not forget the crusty old gentleman in Torben Svendsen's beautiful *The Seventh Age*, who objects to his room mate doing physical jerks, or the old lady in the same film listening to the wedding ceremony through an ear-trumpet. One could trust Søren Melson to find the party of plump men, stripped to the waist, wearing caps, smoking cigars and playing cards under the sweltering sun in *People's Holiday*. Who but Bjarne Henning-Jensen would tackle such a forbidding subject as the care of the teeth by making a party of children play at being dentists and patients? Who but Mogens Skot-Hansen and Hagen Hasselbalch would have thought of making the corn weevils in *The Corn is in Danger* hold a committee meeting in squeaky voices to discuss how to get rid of that pest mankind!

## How can she fail?

Well, there it is. Denmark has come out of the war with a tough and lusty school of documentary. Today she is facing the problem of aligning the documentary film with the new trends of the shifting world, of finding a more stable economic film structure at home, and a more certain distribution outlet abroad. She can scarcely fail. How could she when she has men in the public services with an understanding of film like H. H. Koch, Henning Friis, Dr Fransen, Jørgen Dich and Blom Andersen? When she has a State distributing organization headed by Ebbe Neergaard, journalist, teacher and film critic by training, with a deep knowledge and love for films? And a national sponsoring organization headed by Ib Koch-Olsen, a producer from Radio? And, above all, a body of sensitive and expert directors and cameramen. So, good luck, and good shooting to Ingolf Boisen, Theodor Christensen, Carl Dreyer, Hagen Hasselbalch, Bjarne and Astrid Henning-Jensen, Søren Melson, Ole Palsbo, the Roos Brothers, Torben Svendsen, and to all the others who have contributed so much to the art of film in Denmark.

## HOLLYWOOD JABBERWOCKY

By

L. A. R. DIAMOND

*'Twas ciros, and the cinelords  
Were lollyparsing with their babes:  
All goldwyns were acadawards  
But demille ruled the nabes.*

*'Beware the Jarthurank, my lad!  
The lion's claw, the eagle's wing!  
And when U-I his pix, be glad  
That DOS dos everything?'*

*He took his johnston code in hand:  
Long time the ranksome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the schary tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.*

*And as in quota-quotes he stood,  
The Jarthurank, of happy breed,  
Came boulding through the korda wood  
And caroled on his reed!*

*For sin! For shame! On cleavaged dame  
The censor shears went flicker-flack!  
He scarred the Bard, and coward marred  
Went gallupolling back.*

*'And hast thou hayseed the Jarthurank?  
Come to my arms, my breenish boy!  
O date and day! Elate! L.A.!'  
He xenophobed with joy.*

*'Twas ciros, and the cinelords  
Were lollyparsing with their babes:  
All goldwyns were acadawards  
But demille ruled the nabes.*

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Writers' Guild, Inc., USA.*

served from afar off. One feels that one has met them in the flesh. The introduction of story and plot particularly in Dreyer's *Good Mothers* and Svendsen's *Health for Denmark*, is an interesting departure.

Only one group of films is unsatisfactory. This is the set of travel or tourist films. Beautifully photographed though most of them are, they seem to have been made with no audience in view, or at best for an audience that has been dead and buried these last twenty years. For they seem to be aimed at the middle-class English pre-war traveller (who rarely or never saw tourist films), who used to wander across Europe, snapshotting the peasants, swarming over ruins, carrying his money in a little bag slung round his

\* Two of Christensen's most important films were made independently and are not listed below. They are a fine impressionist survey of the work of the ship-building firm of Boumeister & Wain, and *Det Gaelder din Frihed* (*Your Freedom is at Stake*), a film compilation illustrating life under the Nazis up to the liberation, and based on actuality material shot secretly by members of the underground movement.



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## THE ANATOMY OF HOLLYWOOD

A PERPLEXED British judge several years ago asked 'Who is this Hollywood?' A California city, now part of Los Angeles, it has come to symbolize film makers and their industry. Contrary to common assumption it has begun no major trend, except in fashions. Hollywood is a reflection—out of focus and in technicolor—of the American film-goers who cheered it with more than \$1,800,000,000 at the box office last year. A wit says 'Hollywood is double Dubuque'—doubly a typical city of 44,000 souls in Iowa, as in Britain one might refer to a 'double Wigan'.

Hollywood is young. The community was only a hamlet 30 years ago. Half its top executives and artists are under 40. Their customers are of an even tenderer age. Dr George Gallup, director of Audience Research, Inc., said last March:

The average American movie audience is predominantly a young audience. The nineteen-year-old contributes more to the box office than any other age group. Regular movie attendance seems to begin around the age of twelve. It goes up steadily through the age of nineteen. After that it falls off sharply. Relatively few persons attend the movies with any regularity after the age of thirty-five...

He adds that out of 143 million American, 90 million are able to go to the cinema. Only 58 million of these attend at least once every three weeks; but there are 80 million weekly admissions because of habitual 'repeaters'. Men and boys attend as frequently as women and girls. The 17,000 US theatres are in 10,238 cities and towns. Most of these are in the populous, industrialized north-eastern third of the country, which includes much of the Mid-west.

### Standardization is the Key to Mass-Production

One reason Hollywood has 'gone over big' is that it tailors its films to fit millions of people. Some that seem shapeless are pinned together with a bit of everything that is 'box-office'—i.e. that will attract crowds. Others, unadorned with substance, have been stripped of all that could offend. In short they are like American cheese: good enough to lure lovers of cheese when they can't get the best, but not rank enough to affront potential eaters. Hollywood could build on this broad foundation of appeal because so many Americans, with their high income, can afford to attend the cinema. So, like other 'opiates of the masses'—the Press and radio—Hollywood offers the mean of what is common to all. As common denominator of 'the American Way' it appeals to the young who are always anxious to follow and (in their own slang) to stay 'in the groove'.

Hollywood has capitalized the American folk-myth that an individual through work, luck, and a pure heart can climb to dizzy heights. Few have reached the pinnacle, but at any rate the millions can have the next best thing: for ninety minutes of transfiguration they can become a Myrna Loy or Clark Gable, uninhibited, perfect, triumphant in life and love. Filmgoers live in an everyday environment of keen competition, monotony and frustration. Every day they

struggle for supremacy in deeds and possessions. The tension thus generated is released at the theatre. On the screen, life is good, right and simple. The guy who cheats at cards, or kisses Gable's girl, is inevitably condemned 'up the river' (up the Hudson River to Sing Sing prison in New York State) or (worse) to eternal celibacy.

### The Menu of Film-Fare

Hollywood's biggest assets are its stars. They are worshipped not as actors but as ordinary people who have similarly risen *per ardua ad astra*. The wealth and plenty lavished on them is a right and proper reward of upward struggle, as it also is for wealthy businessmen. Hollywood's deity today is singing, kidding, easy-going, average-guy Bing Crosby. Bing's 'fans' (from the word 'fanatic') go to the films to see Bing, and not the character of priest or gold prospector which he portrays. They do not see an actor or his acting. Some stars even feel slighted if they become famous as the characters they create, rather than as themselves.

In a country where the unusual is usual and the impossible is always happening, exaggeration is a simple colloquialism. Much of the unreality in Hollywood films is therefore taken by Americans with a laugh; but the British, who venerate understatement, are dismayed by it. Conversely, the slow, diffident, undramatized realism of good British films and their characters seems pedestrian to many an American who enjoys high-speed heroics, slapstick, and sledgehammer drama, with all the characters 'over-typed'.

The least plausible of standard US film-fare are perhaps the 'Westerns' or 'horse operas'. These make up 54 per cent of Hollywood's output. They are seldom seen in the big theatres in the cities, but appear regularly in out-of-the-way places and small towns. Strangely enough they are a smash-hit in the West itself, where modern ranch hands delight in seeing cow-ponies gallop twenty miles without ill effects. But these 'sagebrush sagas' are mainly supported by the very young, who after school and even in summer don their spurs to join forces with Hollywood's brave and true cowboys. The audience is a bedlam of youngsters cheering, taking pot-shots with cap-pistols at villains and overcoming all dangers in an afternoon of hard and fast riding. Villainy never wins. Virtue always does. If this is bad for youth, it can only be because adult life is never as fair!

### The Psychology of Realism and Escapism

Millions of Americans will go to any movie. Many of them want relaxation, not entertainment; and some sit and sleep. As Dr Philip J. Rulon, acting Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, said on February 25th: 'This may prove they are tired, but it cannot prove they are dumb.' Hollywood's success is also partly because habitual film-goers become dependent on films and radio for 'canned' amuse-

ment. Because of this, Hollywood to the delight of its youthful fans continually tries to out-do itself. American producers have made good pictures, but some of their best just turned into 'box-office poison'. One, 'The Ox-Bow Incident', an excellent drama of a lynching, barely made a box-office ripple.

The screen, therefore, keeps behind the public taste. Producers prefer to use a successful idea over and over again to protect their enormous investment. Self-imitation also affects the plot. Hence the epidemic of 'animal epics' and 'psychological thrillers'. Bette Davis was neurotic yet a hit, two years ago in 'Now, Voyager'. So today, Laraine Day is a kleptomaniac in 'The Locket' and Joan Crawford, who was only slightly disturbed mentally in 'Mildred Pierce', goes completely 'off her trolley' in 'Possessed'. Some star who went 'nuts' in celluloid will probably win the 1947 awards for acting—unless, of course, they get nosed out at the winning post by a horse, dog, or other mammal.

Hollywood is subject to pressure groups and 'lobbies' ranging from political interests to the Glass Bottle Blowers Association, which complained when Gary Cooper drank canned beer (see 'The Art of Lobbying' in A.O. No 17, p. 167). Criticism has also been on moral grounds; but most of that is negative. It resulted in the Motion Picture Association's moral code, equally negative, which was devised to stave off Government regulation. But the code has not silenced vast numbers of still indignant religious, women's and educational organizations. Most of these groups attack the screen for setting a pace, whereas, if anything, it follows the public too much. They fail to see Hollywood's chief criticizable influence: its cutting of dies out of certain vulgar patterns in American life and its crushingly repetitive die-stamping of them, in reverse, on the cinema-going public. Sociologist Leo T. Rosten wrote in his study *Hollywood* 'Whether the movies imitate life, or whether life imitates the movies, is for others to decide; this writer believes that, like missionaries on a desert island, they begin to convert each other.'

### Bigger and Better Business

Eight gigantic producing companies, known as the 'majors', dominate Hollywood. They are largely controlled by eastern (New York, etc.) capital. All except United Artists, Inc. are members of the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., of which Eric Johnston—former President of the US Chamber of Commerce—is president. But United Artists joins the others to help form the Motion Picture Export Association, Inc., also headed by Johnston.

Today the whole US film industry is caught between rising costs and a shrunken home market. American films grossed \$2,700 million at America's and the world's box offices in 1946, a 10 per cent rise over 1945. Out of this, the seven MPA majors netted \$120 million as compared to a \$65 million net in 1945. *Variety*, leading entertainment magazine, reported on December 18th, 1946, that 64 per cent of this gain



(\$35 million) was the big seven's savings as a result of Congressional action which erased the Government excess profits tax at the outset of 1946. But costs of production in 1946 soared to \$413 million for just over 400 pictures, a 25 per cent rise in a year. And to cap it all, US box-office receipts have skidded from what the *Wall Street Journal* calls the 'super colossal' to the 'mere colossal'. Typical estimates point to a slump of 12 to 20 per cent so far this year.

#### Mr Eric Johnston and his Influence

Hollywood films scooped \$900 million gross from the foreign market last year, or 35 per cent of their gross total. Almost \$400 million gross came from the UK. The advent of Johnston to the MPA showed the concern for this market. He was preceded by Will Hays, a political intimate of President Warren G. Harding. Hays' function was to protect Hollywood interests on the domestic front. (The code for moral suitability of films was administered by the famous 'Hays Office'.) Johnston, however, is a political theorist and businessman. As former President of the US Chamber of Commerce he has contacts all over the world. Last fall he adopted a 'get tough' policy with the MPEA urging them to export only select films and abandon such offensive practices as stereotyped portrayals—e.g. Englishmen who always wear monocles and look, and are, silly. He is highly aware of the competition US films face from British pictures in such territory as Latin America, and is convinced that Hollywood must help its country meet the threat of Soviet power. He has repeatedly told MPA members that US films must carry the message of free enterprise to the world. (Hollywood's reaction to this, so far, has been one of deep astonishment.) Meanwhile Johnston is working closely with his friends Will Clayton, Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, and William Benton, Assistant Secretary of State, as well as with Secretary of State Marshall to advance the international exchange of films (*A.O.* No 4, p. 34). This, and the fact that he has been mentioned as a possible Republican Vice-Presidential partner with Governor Dewey in 1948, makes him one of Hollywood's prize personalities.

#### British and American Films in Each Other's Country

American films reaped approximately £16,750,000 net from the United Kingdom, while British products only nipped about \$8,500,000 net from the US market. Even so, Hollywood's net income from the UK was only 17 per cent of its gross income in the UK. The rest remained in Britain for distribution, exhibition, taxes, etc. Therefore the 'majors' were busily buying shares in British and other foreign theatres and distribution chains. Profits from these investments will be clipped by the new cut in British film imports, but the new British ban on transfer of more than a quarter of US film profits into dollars will put an abrupt stop on 'direct' investments in the British film trade.

The big Hollywood companies have profited directly by importing British films into the US since 95 per cent of the US film industry's capital of \$2,600 million is in theatres. Here, too, are most of the profits. Despite eight years of the US Government's anti-trust action against them in the courts—for monopolistic practices—the eight 'majors' control 73 per cent of the theatres in 92 cities with a population of more than 100,000 each. They also dominate 16 per cent of all US theatres, and hold shares in thousands

more. British pictures may easily get from \$12 million to \$20 million from the US market in 1947, but not in 1948.

So with eyes on the profits British films will make in US theatres, as well as on the benefits of trade, five major US theatre circuits last June handed to Mr J. Arthur Rank play-dates (engagements) totalling \$12 million yearly. The agreement provided that only the best of British films be shown. This was the first real chance British films had to compete in America as a whole with the home product.

#### Would British Films have Succeeded?

'Stix still nix Brit pix despite crix': in Hollywood lingo this means British films will not have an easy time drawing American crowds. (Stix means sticks, backwoods, rural areas and small cities; nix means negative towards; Brit, British; pix, pictures; and crix, critics or newspaper columnists, who have generally been favourable to London products.) *Variety*, after an exhaustive coast-to-coast survey, stated on June 18th:

Most sections of the country, in fact, virtually every section except the metropolitan centres along both coasts, are continuing to exhibit the same time-old allergy to foreign films which was evidenced before the war. The principal difference is that there are more exceptions... such as the British *Henry V*.

Yet there is an undercurrent of apprehension in certain segments of the American film industry over the excellence of recent British films. This misgiving is magnified by the home box-office slump. The MPA claims it is an economic sign of the times. Admission prices are an average of 47 cents, a 50 per cent increase in six years. But producers note that good films still get the biggest crowds. And the thirty-two million Americans who remain potential film-goers are still there. Many of Hollywood's grade-B pictures may therefore soon quit the screen. The Government's anti-trust suit against the 'majors' has reached the US Supreme Court. If the Government is upheld, producers will be enjoined, among other restrictions, from compelling theatres to buy a block of grade-B pictures with each grade-A film.

#### Film Finance and Film Quality

A writer or musician in Hollywood can earn \$2,000 a week and then go unemployed for months. Most producers have made a million and have also lost one. Hollywood is not as jaunty as it seems. It is basically timid and shrewd. The fate of the 'independent studios' shows this. Last year one-third of all US films were 'shot' by independents. Many 'indies' were formed by directors and actors whose 'artistic freedom' boiled down to selling their company after it had made one picture, because that way they had to pay only a 25 per cent capital gains tax instead of an income tax as high as 60 to 80 per cent! And independents are never free from the 'majors' anyway; for 'majors' take over the distribution and exhibition of their films. Today, because of the general economic uncertainty, the 'indies' are scampering back to the 'majors' fold.

But even the 'majors' have to have financing. The Guaranty Trust of New York, one of Hollywood's biggest financiers, has practically withdrawn from the film business. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 20th 'A New York banker who makes a lot of loans to Hollywood explained that his institution now insists on the best talent, and even then will loan only

50 to 60 per cent of production costs. A year ago it would have loaned 60 to 70 per cent even though producers and actors weren't top-level.' Because of this, Hollywood has doubled its efforts to cut costs. Ironically, it has for twenty years fostered public taste for fabulous settings. Now it looks with interest at the realism British films achieve with flimsy sets. Hollywood has also cut its personnel from 30,000 to 21,000 in a year. The re-issuing of old films has been another money-saver. Today all 'majors' withdraw popular pictures in time to protect their future profits on re-issuing them. More than ever, Hollywood seeks to protect its enormous investment by filming best-selling books and plays. (Only half of all screen stories are original; popular plots are used over and over again with new titles.) Paramount financed the 'legitimate stage' production of Broadway's Pulitzer Prize play 'State of the Union' with \$300,000 just to obtain the film rights. Some producers are even trying to 'capture' popular books and songs by buying shares in publishing houses and gramophone record companies.

#### The British Blow at Hollywood and the Future

Now, at the British Government's penal emergency tax on its UK profits, Hollywood professes itself thunderstruck. It has thunderstruck back (through the MPEA) by banning exports of new US films to Britain. The tax roused more resentment in Hollywood than an outright British ban on imports of US films; for, somewhat querulously and partially, Hollywood spokesmen complained that HM Government had given them no 'tip-off', and they had only expected, at worst, a new tax of 25 to 50 per cent—not a full 75 per cent. Hollywood's hope is that British film fans and theatre owners, plus possible State Department pressure on the British authorities, will modify the tax. In this connection, Mr Eric Johnston's personal relations with the State Department should not be overlooked.

The chief fear in Hollywood is that the British action will set an example to other dollar-short countries—who multiply daily. Reorganization of the whole US film business is now necessary because of the interdependence of domestic and foreign business. Hollywood is too confused at present to chart its course. One 'independent' producer said, 'I think it's the worst crisis in Hollywood's history.' Many producers, especially 'independents', claim that their earnings in the US cover only their film production costs, or even a fraction of their costs. All their profits, and possibly some coverage of costs, came from earnings abroad, above all in Britain. The 'majors' are better off because they get profits from their own theatres even if their production costs are not met.

The chances are that US retaliation will not stop the Rank play-dates because there are six months' supplies of untaxable US films now in Britain plus possible re-issues of old films. Thus 1947 profits may be untouched by the British action last week. But all the trends hitherto obvious—resulting from rising costs and slower box-office returns—will be intensified. Hollywood is expected to redouble its efforts to open the Latin American and South African markets. This sudden British sharpening of Hollywood's difficulties in financing coincides with difficulties in cutting costs—labour unions in Hollywood are very strong. So more filming abroad is probable, especially south of California

(Continued foot of page 142)



# GOVERNMENT FILM-MAKING IN AUSTRALIA

By

Edward Cranstone

IN July, 1945, the Australian Commonwealth Government took the step forward in their film-producing policy of forming a National Film Board, and appointing to it as Films Commissioner, Ralph Foster, of the National Film Board, Canada.

In deciding to mould their film-making activities on the pattern of their sister Dominion they could not have done better, for Foster brought to Australia some of the vitality and organization of what is perhaps today the ideal set-up for the production and distribution of Government films. The production of Australian Government films had not previously been on a scale comparable with other countries, and the films produced, usually two or three a year, had been made under the administration of the Department of Commerce, chiefly to advertise agricultural products overseas. They were boringly factual and their commentaries were freely interspersed with the words 'Now we see—'.

With the advent of the war in 1939, the Films Division went over to the newly-formed Department of Information, which, being largely comprised of newspaper men, was apathetic about the use of film, concentrating their propaganda mediums rather on still photography and journalism. Later they sent a cameraman to the Middle East. They did not know at the time that this obscure young man was to become a world-famous name in the sphere of war photography. The young cameraman was Damien Parer.

The material sent back by the war cameramen was, by mutual arrangement, sent straight to the newsreels, where it was processed and edited. Although this solved the distribution problem, it is doubtful if it served the best interests of the nation; for it gave the privately-owned newsreel companies the right to use the material how and if they liked. Indeed, much splendid material never saw the screen because of prejudice against an 'unknown photographer'.

This prejudice can be understood in the light of the Government's refusal to allow newsreel men to operate in war areas. Harmony was restored eventually when several of the 'old school' newsreel men were engaged by the Department as war cameramen, and the companies felt that their prestige had been restored. However, when the Japs were thundering at Australia's front door in 1942, and the most thrilling of all Australian newsreels hit the screen, namely *Kokoda Trail*, it was not shot by the 'old school', but by the obscure young man, Damien Parer. Unfortunately for films, Parer was killed in action in September, 1944.

When the war ended, the Australian War Memorial was far-sighted enough to collect from the newsreels all material that had been shot, and fortunately it is now preserved for posterity.

Today the Government Films Division is organized on a better footing than ever before.

Not equalling its Canadian counterpart in size or scope, it is nevertheless built on a sound foundation and can look forward to expansion in the future. One of Ralph Foster's first tasks was to find new personnel for the enlarged Department. He enlisted enthusiastic young people released from the Forces, to train as scriptwriters, production assistants, etc., and sought out technicians who had drifted away from the Department during the war. He found new directors and was assisted in this task by such men as Harry Watt and Joris Ivens, who were in Australia at the time. One of these young directors, John Heyer, worked with Watt on *The Overlanders*. Units were formed and the task was begun of implementing the programme recommended by the Film Board. Films included both subjects suggested by the Department of Information and those sponsored by other bodies.

As the units were necessarily widely dispersed, the need was felt for a Chief Producer, who could act as a co-ordinator for all units and a liaison between technicians and administration. The man chosen for this post was Stanley Hawes, well-known documentary man who had worked with Grierson both in England and Canada. Stanley Hawes, with his sympathetic approach and keen sense of discrimination, did much to guide the young documentary makers on a steady course and to assist the older members to a documentary approach.

Naturally the new Films Division is suffering the growing pains that all similar organizations are prone to. Inability to obtain apparatus for the expanded personnel, lack of adequate working space, transport difficulties (no mean factor in Australia's open spaces), film stock shortages and, of course, the petty squabbles and jealousies that are found so often in creative circles. Gradually difficulties are being ironed out and months of hard work have borne fruit; films are emerging that should bear comparison with documentaries anywhere. Indeed, two of the films have been acquired by MGM for world release and others are under consideration. *Native Earth*, the first, deals with the Labour Government's new deal for the natives of New Guinea, while the second, *Journey of a Nation*, deals with the problem of transport bottlenecks, caused by Australia's broken gauge railway system. Three 16 mm Kodachrome subjects, *Turn the Soil*, *Men and Mobs*, and *Born in the Sun*, have been turned out for the Department of Commerce, and, although the subjects are the same as of old—wheat, sheep and dried fruits—they have been given an entirely new interest by the use of an historical approach. The soft colour of Australia's sombre background, with much attention given to typical sound and voices, give to the films that spirit of nationalism which might be expected in the Government produced film. *Namatjira*, also in Kodachrome, depicts the life of the Australian aboriginal. It is

shot entirely in Central Australia, using as actors only the natives themselves. The unusual music, based on aboriginal themes, is by a very young composer, Charles Mackerras, who is now in London. Stanley Hawes contributes a delightful effort called *School in the Mailbox*, about the education by correspondence of the out-back child; while *Watch over Japan* deals with Australia's role in the Japanese occupation. Three films, *Men Wanted*, *Street in Suburbia* and *Nuriootpa*, are sponsored by the Department of Immigration, and a series called *Australian Diary* is produced by the Department of Information itself. Other films produced from within the Department show life in Australian towns and cities and Australian sports and pastimes. Some of these have been severely criticized as 'tourist' films and much space has been devoted to discussion in newspapers and periodicals by writers who are anxious that the way of the new National Film Board will be along the road to reality and not in the romantic backwaters of past errors. If this sort of healthy discussion and criticism continues, so much the better for Australian film making, as it is only by taking an active interest in the work of their Governments that people anywhere can expect results.

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in Mexico where labour is cheap. Many US producers who had counted on good revenues from Britain are caught with costly pictures on their hands, e.g. the \$6,000,000 'Forever Amber'. Economy must now be the order of the day.

## Better US Films

Fewer and better US pictures may capture more of the home and Canadian markets, but because of high costs the absolute number of pictures produced must now be cut, especially those in grade B. Longer runs in the theatres for each film are also forecast, and even more frequent re-issues (though the latter quickly show 'diminishing returns'). Finally there is film technology. Will it come to Hollywood's aid? An expert motion-picture technological correspondent reports to us from Hollywood that this cannot be taken for granted. Nothing unusual is expected for the next five to ten years. Steady and unspectacular improvements in sound and photography are all that's foreseen. The much-talked-of three-dimensional movies cannot even be said to be in the laboratory stage yet. The US Navy developed the tridimensional photograph; but the inventor only says it 'may' be adaptable to motion pictures.

Thus for severely practical reasons, better American films may soon unroll. But it is still unsure if they will. The natives of Hollywood have learned to believe nothing they hear and only half they see. And the British may not even see American films at all!



## NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

### HOW AN AEROPLANE FLIES

#### Part I. Lift

#### Part II. Drag

#### Part VI. Controls

Made by Shell Film Unit. Camera: Sidney Beadle. Animation: Francis Rodker and A. J. Shaw.

These three self-contained parts of Shell's new films on aerodynamics, for the use of students of aviation, flying personnel and ground staff in training, and senior forms in schools, were previewed in August. The remaining three parts will be completed shortly. The three parts shown represent a considerable achievement on the part of the team which planned and made them, among whom were Sydney Beadle, photography, John Rodker and A. J. Shaw, diagrams. They are, in fact, first-class teaching films which physics and general science masters will find of the utmost value for their senior forms—age group 13+ if belonging to A stream; though they will be more appreciated by 14 and 15-year-olds who are able to think in abstract terms.

Yet, while the ability to think in abstract terms and to understand abstract principles is necessary in the student who is going to learn most from these films, the empirical method has been very rightly used. Progressing from the known to the unknown and proving the latter in terms of the former, is the accepted practice among the most advanced teachers; it is also the essence of good instructional film-making in my opinion, especially in the realms of physics and general science.

Part I—*Lift*, shows how an aeroplane actually rises and remains airborne, a mystery many scientists from Icarus and Leonardo da Vinci onwards have guessed at but never been able to control. The introductory sequences, showing the action of the wind above and below the flat surface of a piece of paper and of leaves fluttering to the ground, are admirably done, though they are perhaps over-long. The 'known' in this case is so easily recognized and understood that it could have been cut down by several examples and a longer time spent on the 'unknown', the Venturi tube and the effect of the change in air pressure on the upper and lower wings, which controls the force which keeps the aeroplane in the air.

How much the amount of lift is governed by the angle of the wing is also shown clearly. Diagram and model are ingeniously used, sometimes in conjunction with each other as in most Shell films.

Part II—*Drag*, is the simplest of the three films to grasp at one showing; it could also have been reduced to the standard length of one reel, which to my mind makes a good maximum length for a direct teaching film. (Part I is 1½ reels in length; Part II 1½ reels and Part VI 1 reel.)

*Drag* shows the wind's resistance to forward movement, first of the human body and then of an aeroplane. Technical construction, such as stream-lining, is shown as reducing this impediment to speed.

Part VI—*Controls*, surprises by the apparent simplicity by which an aeroplane is controlled, but this apparent simplicity is misleading. The control of an aircraft is shown to be an exact science based on precise knowledge of the effect of the slightest pressure on the elevators and the control surfaces at the wing tips which will change the aircraft's motion and direction from dive to climb, from bank to roll, from a straight course to a sharp turn. . . .

This film has less than the other two of the gradual build-up technique and is perhaps the least satisfactory for that reason, although its lessons are taught clearly and well, with no burking of the difficult flying shots.

After seeing these three films I am more than ever convinced that the Shell Unit are making some of the best educational films of today, and have a good deal to teach the rest of us who are working in this difficult field about good, clear, sound instructional film technique.

AN EDUCATIONAL FILM PRODUCER

*Convection, Conduction and Radiation*. Realist for British Gas Council in association with Film Centre. Direction and Photography: Alec Strasser. Distribution: British Gas Council. 8 mins. each film.

While the Committees have been conferring, British Gas Council and Realist have acted. Strasser, Bennell, Parsons, Dorothy Grayson (which of them to single out for credit who can say? Let's think of it as a team) have produced abiding models of what teaching films should be. Each of these three films is made up of a series of short sequences which take us step by step towards an understanding of the subject. Each sequence ends with a question which it leaves the audience to answer. In other words, here are three films which can be shown together, or separately, or in bits—according to the requirements and capabilities of teacher, class and curriculum. What is perhaps even more impressive, the short sequences (some of which may not run to more than half-a-dozen shots) are devised with quite outstanding imagination. Going back to the words with which this review opened, it seems likely that to Alec Strasser must go the lion's share of the bouquets. There was real genius in *Your Children's Eyes*—that fantastic and yet completely logical sequence of the orange—and there is genius here again. All this may sound too much of a panegyric. Of course, the films aren't perfect; of course, everybody, including Realist, has a lot to learn about making teaching films (for example, the spoken word was perhaps over-complicated, and its delivery oddly inhuman), but even if we must proceed in arithmetical progression before we finally reach a perfect standard, at least Realist has found something which has eluded everyone else, the first term to start us on the way. Committee B has emitted many vague pages adumbrating, in what they think to be specific terms, which no producer must dare to contradict, some scores of films they want to make. In fairness to the

teachers they represent, and to the producers whom they apparently dismiss as amateurs, they should see *Convection, Conduction and Radiation*. They might learn a lot.

*Twenty-four Square Miles*. Basic for COI. Production: R. K. Neilson Baxter. Direction: Kay Mander. Photography: A. Englander. Editing: Adam Dawson. Animation: Cynthia Whitby. Model: J. P. McCrum. Distribution: Non-Theatrical. 43 mins.

The twenty-four square miles are a section of Oxfordshire covered by one sheet of the 6 in. ordnance survey map. The film illustrates a detailed survey of this once made by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute of the University of Oxford in 1943. Everything is covered: occupations, housing and public services, education, entertainments, local government. It is rather surprising that the point of view of farm workers as such is not dealt with: for instance, the tied cottage—important in any consideration of rural problems—is not mentioned. But, by and large, the facts are given honestly and thoroughly, even if the super-objectivity of the presentation makes for flatness.

Technical execution is very good. The director has managed in very short scenes, to capture unerringly the atmosphere of village whist-drives, Women's Institute lectures and Parish Council meetings. Both photography and cutting are crisp and to the point. Two weaknesses stand out. One is the use of the large contour map. Were this confined to an explanation of the layout of the area in its various aspects, the only complaint could be of an occasional lack of clarity in the direction. Unfortunately, the map is also used to cover statistics and other commentary points which could more clearly and more excitingly have been put over by actuality shots. The other weakness is in the effects track, which never quite makes up its mind whether to be there or not.

The great problem is to discover why, in spite of thoroughness, honesty, and technical excellence, the film remains unsatisfying. To those actively engaged on planning, it will be an invaluable work of reference. But reference works are for specialists. The conviction, the imagination that will arouse interest and will give a broad understanding have no place in them. The layman is apt to gain from this perusal only an impression of a lot of facts and figures, and perhaps a memory of some of the main headings. A more compelling picture of the problems of rural reconstruction might have been achieved by taking a smaller area—say a single village—and giving it a fuller, warmer, more intimate treatment. But even using all of the twenty-four square miles, some positive feeling might have resulted from keying all the analysis to some definite activity or project. As it is, the layman is likely to walk out feeling 'Most interesting, and all very complex and difficult', and then forget all about it.

Owing to lack of space some reviews have been held over for the next issue.

Correction on last issue's review of 'Take Thou': it should have read 'Production: R. K. Neilson Baxter'; our apologies to Basic Film Unit.



# AUDIENCE RESEARCH —FREE DISCUSSION

By a member of Shell Film Unit

AT the Shell Film Unit in May, 1947, we showed the first two of a series of six films on 'How an Aeroplane Flies' to an audience of thirty school-boys of matriculation standard. The idea was to find out how the techniques employed would be received, and how they would think the films could be improved.

The thirty boys, who were on the science side of a London school, were accompanied by their senior and junior science masters. The other adults in the audience included the producer, the three co-directors of five of the series of six films, and an observer from the Institute of Human Relations. None of the boys had any extensive knowledge of aerodynamics, though some had flown and two had recently joined the ATC.

It was decided that since the questionnaire method had already been tried on other audiences in respect of one of the films (*Lift*), free discussion should be tried out on this occasion. (An account of the 'questionnaire' experiment was published in *DNL* Vol. 6, 51st issue.)

The afternoon was conducted as follows. First the fact that experts in the subject were consulted during the making of the films was explained to the audience, and they were invited to consider themselves as a group of experts who were there to suggest how the films could be improved. *Lift* was then projected. Discussion on *Lift* followed for about twenty minutes, after which there was a break for tea (the appropriate time having arrived) and then *Drag* was projected and afterwards discussed for about half an hour.

The free discussion form of audience-reaction test provides no objective standards or statistical answers such as can be obtained from a questionnaire, and a summary of conclusions can only be a subjective one and to a certain extent personal to the observer.

As far as could be judged, all the boys were keen to help with the experiment, and (after a little initial shyness) were not abashed by the presence of strange adults.

The two films, *Lift* and *Drag* were made with this type of audience as their lowest intended age-group, and are also destined for use in training air crews and ground staff. *Lift* employs simple analogies (e.g. boys marching between benches forming a narrow gap to explain Venturi effect), a good deal of demonstration apparatus (e.g. a wind machine directing a stream of air over a model wing to which pressure gauges are connected to show the variations in pressure on the upper and lower surfaces), and some shots of aeroplanes in flight, stalling and landing. The commentary in both films is simple and direct. No music or effects are used. *Lift* employs no diagrams; but in *Drag* several diagrams are used, the use of analogy is slightly increased, and there are more actuality shots of aircraft. *Drag* was shown in the cutting copy (run double-headed), which was in a fairly complete state, opticals having already been cut in. A married print of

*Lift* was shown. The two films are of approximately the same length—sixteen minutes each.

The most encouraging thing (from the film-maker's point of view) was that both films apparently promoted a desire for further knowledge of the subject. After seeing *Lift* a hot discussion raged on what happened when an aeroplane went vertically upwards; after *Drag* there was quite a bit of argument about the terms 'resistance' and 'drag' which the boys did not regard as synonymous.

There was (especially during the second film) a very keen noting of points of detail—'The oars would be deeper in the water' (of a shot showing the swirls made in water by oars); 'One of the weights' (on a balance) 'seemed to be a different size from the rest'. 'When you had the oil in a beaker and water in a beaker and air in a beaker, you put the rod into the air beaker and said it wasn't so sticky, and a drop of water came out' (fell off the glass rod which had just been in the water beaker). 'You didn't say the flaps had dropped' (of a stop-frame shot of an aeroplane landing).

In fact, nothing escaped their eagle eyes, which amply confirms the fact that 'It'll get by' is not good enough.

An important point concerned tempo and construction. The film *Lift*, because of the nature of its content, goes straight through from beginning to end, without definite breaks. *Drag* on the other hand is broken by section titles into a short introduction and three sections, and concludes with a summary. After the showing of *Lift* there was a general feeling that the film was 'a bit fast'. On analysis this proved to mean, not that too little time was spent on each point, but that the points came too quickly on top of one another. The demand was for more breathing space: 'It didn't give much time for each point to sink in.' 'It was a bit fast, I didn't feel I could do with the four' (five) 'other films.' There was general agreement that the section titles in *Drag* overcame these difficulties, which serves to emphasize that instructional films must be punctuated. Simple section titles are apparently good punctuation marks, but it was agreed that wordy titles are undesirable; for instance one boy suggested that there should be a title mentioning all the main-points at the end of each film. He was howled down by his companions, and then said that it would not be a good idea.

One boy had 'close-up trouble'. He complained that he saw a man walk up to an aeroplane, and then the man was 'taken away and we only saw his hand', an interestingly naive way of describing the cut from mid-shot to close-up, reminiscent of the cry 'Where are their feet?' which is said to have gone up when D. W. Griffith invented the close-up. In general, however, this audience appeared not to share this trouble, being normally conditioned to cinema. It is interesting, however, that this isolated instance of close-up trouble occurred on a close-up of a hand; there was ap-

parently no difficulty over close-ups of faces, which are far more common on feature films than are close-ups of other parts of the body.

More serious was the complaint that (of *Drag*) 'the film darted about from place to place too much'. On analysis, this was found to concern a sequence of wind-machine and balance demonstration in which (after the general set-up had been established) close-ups of the scale pan, the pointer and the object whose drag was being measured were intercut fairly rapidly. The boys agreed that they wanted to 'stand back and watch the whole experiment'. At the same time they criticized the 'waste of time watching all the weights go on the scale pan one by one', so it is apparent that the determination of correct tempo depends largely on the degree of obviousness of the point being made. This is bound to vary with different audiences. This came out very clearly in discussion of a graph illustrating the fact that the drag of a given object varies as the square of the velocity. In the film this graph was slowly built up from experimental evidence obtained in the preceding sequence. Long before it really looked like a graph, the boys were muttering impatiently, anticipating the final form of the diagram, and in subsequent discussion it came out that the boys were accustomed to graphical methods of dealing with these sort of data, and would have been prepared to leap straight from the experiment to the finished graph without intermediate steps. With another audience the intermediate steps might have been essential, and it is quite probable that to be ahead of the instruction once in a while is no bad thing.

It was at this stage that it became evident that this class of boys were conscious of themselves as a group—they discussed the effect that certain sequences were likely to have on people younger or older than themselves, and asked what sort of people the films were made for.

The audience were critical of certain diagrams and water-flow shots in which white dashes or dark particles moved right across screen. They complained that these were 'hard on the eyes' and that 'it was hard to concentrate on the particles—hard for the eyes to follow—the whole screen seemed to run away from you.'

Although there is little concrete justification in the notes of this discussion, certain doubts were raised in the minds of the film-makers on the real value of the visual analogy technique. On the whole the images that stuck in the minds of the members of this audience were the direct examples rather than the analogies—a sequence showing stream-lined and non-streamlined objects in an air flow made visible by smoke, for instance, had far greater impact than the analogy of a sliding pack of cards which illustrated the behaviour of air layers in the boundary region of an aircraft's skin.

Again, the brief appearance of a very personable young woman struggling against the wind at the beginning of *Drag* caused quite a stir, but it is



doubtful whether she alone made the point. Nevertheless, she probably served a useful purpose in creating interest and a desire to watch the screen—teachers sometimes employ shock tactics to force the attention of a class, and this particular sequence can be justified on this score.

To sum up, it is evident (if indeed it is not well-known already) that films of this kind should be punctuated and divided into sections; that the timing should allow breathing space, but should not be so leisurely that the audience gets irritatingly far ahead of the film; that the greatest possible care should be taken to lead the eye to the right place in the screen; that screen geography (between shots) should be a matter of the utmost concern, and that no mistakes or incongruities should be permitted. The whole question of analogy in instructional films deserves careful examination. Twentieth century physics relies less and less on sense-experience and sense-analogy, and it is probable that a too-lavish use of analogy in films and other teaching media is definitely harmful.

We, the film makers, learned, or were firmly reminded of, all these points, but the main result of the afternoon was that we were greatly stimulated. This close contact with a real live audience, just at the stage of cutting when one never wants to see the film again, gave us a fine injection of fresh enthusiasm. And we doubt if we should have experienced such candour, such quickness on the point, and such easy discipline of discussion had we assembled thirty adult aerodynamicists to give us their opinion of the films.

For this stimulation alone, the experiment was well worth while, and this method (in contrast to the questionnaire method) is within the reach of any production unit, and might well be tried at or near the end of every film of this type.

#### CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION SCRIPTWRITING COMPETITION

The Central Office of Information is holding a competition for documentary film script-writers. While established film-writers are not barred from competing, the purpose of the competition is to discover new talent among free-lance writers.

The competition is open to all, except employees of the Central Office of Information.

Competitors are required to write a full treatment for a short film on ONE of the following subjects:

'Face the Facts': a film about Britain's post-war economic problems.

'Get Home Safe and Sound': a film to encourage all road users—drivers and pedestrians—to co-operate in avoiding accidents.

'Portrait of an Englishman': a film which says something about the English character, for overseas audiences.

The films should preferably be one reel (about ten minutes) in length, and should certainly not be longer than two reels (twenty minutes).

A first prize of £75 and a second prize of £50 will be awarded by the judges.

All competitors will be required to submit an entry form together with their treatment. Entry forms and full details of conditions of the competition can be obtained on application to Films Division, Central Office of Information, 81-85 Baker Street, London, W1.

Closing date will be December 1st, 1947

## FILM FACILITIES IN THE PROVINCES No. 2—

# LEICESTER

By

L. HELLIWELL

LEICESTER has the reputation of being 'a nice place', a popular opinion not without considerable justification, for apart from its pleasing physical appearance, the city is attentive to the mental as well as the material life of its inhabitants. In the world of music and the fine arts generally it is held in high regard, and so much is going on that it is hardly possible for any intelligent and eager person not to find some outlet for his interest.

The general picture is so very satisfying that when one comes up against the exception it is with a jolt. This jolt exists in the world of the film. If you are satisfied that the film should remain only a medium of entertainment and that the prescribed forms and limits of this entertainment continue to your taste, then you will have no complaint. Should you incline to the experimental or wish to see films other than the typical Anglo-American, you will be obliged to see them privately or save up for a visit to 'Town'. In short, the commercial cinema world of this city of approximately 250,000 does not cater for any other than the general.

Possessing 29 cinemas with an approximate seating capacity of 30,000 (thus giving one seat for every 8/9 people), Leicester compares very favourably with other cities of comparable size. Statistics of numbers of visits to the cinema by each inhabitant per week are not available, but from personal observation it would appear that Lestrans are more eager patrons of the cinema than elsewhere. Perhaps then managements cannot be blamed for keeping to the stereotyped double feature or 'full supporting' programme. Sure of full houses and knowing that appreciation of any film other than 'pure' entertainment is limited, they rarely experiment.

Is it surprising, therefore, that showings of Continental and other films of an international reputation have been few and hesitant? They have been billed, but to have to withdraw a film on the third day and replace with a dated 'popular' programme is a risk managements are reluctant to take twice. The city does not possess a 'News' or repertory cinema; hence showings of factual films have been in a casual time-filling capacity without pattern or reason. These films rarely achieve the audience they deserve, nor is this audience (which undoubtedly exists) in a position to see the films it desires. Under these conditions the factual film has remained submerged and only under more courageous management will it gain a deserved reputation. Regrettably, at present, there seems no possibility of this.

The use of the film in any other capacity than entertainment is therefore left to the non-commercial world and here are two ventures that Leicester can regard with pride. The Leicester Film Society, founded in 1931 and now having 480 members, has done excellent work. The aims of the Society are summarized as '(a) the showing of important films which have not been seen in Leicester, or which have had insufficient show-

ing; (b) the reviving of classic films of all kinds; (c) the showing of Continental films of reasonable merit to enable members to be familiar with what is being done there; and (d) the showing of short films of especial interest. In all cases the films chosen will be of value to the student of the history, art and technique of film making'. The eagerness to experiment and depth of vision of this Society is well illustrated by the selection of films shown during the last winter: *Princess Kaguya* (Japan), *Avalanche*, *Marie Louise* (Switzerland), *Le Jour se Leve*, *L'Homme qui cherche la vérité* (France), *Jazz Comedy* (USSR). These, in addition to four outstanding USA films and 23 short films of varying types, indicate the comprehensiveness and fine judgment of the Society, the credit of which falls in a large measure to the energetic guidance of the Film Secretary, Mr J. R. Cottrill, BA. To the latter also the Society is indebted for the excellence of its equipment, having, in addition to the latest designed 35 mm projector, continuously variable tone and volume control in the hall itself with microphone attached for commentary.

One department of the local authority also has been courageous. In 1939 the Public Libraries Committee of the City Council installed a 35 mm projector in a new branch library and, since then, with a break early in the war years, has held programmes each winter. Their intention is frankly educational through the creation of interest and, by combining films, speakers, and books on a chosen theme they aim to increase public awareness and understanding of the problems of the day.

This utilitarian use of the film is a pioneer effort to Leicester's credit; many factual films (approximately 50 are shown each winter) which otherwise would not be seen in the city, find a select but appreciative audience. The use of a speaker guiding the subject to suit local conditions enhances the value of the documentary film, a method to be commended to other authorities.

Other than the above, film facilities appear to be occasional. The Education authority is making increasing use of the instructional and travel film for older scholars. The Leicester Colleges of Art and Technology make wide use of the film on subjects with which the work of the colleges is concerned, and the Vaughan College each winter holds a course of study in film history, technique and appreciation. The Museum and Art Gallery Committee is to use a 16 mm for wider appeal in its work, and other bodies, adult education, British Legion and trade associations have in their turn made occasional use of the film to put over some desired point.

To summarize, while Leicester has no reason to be ashamed of its film facilities, it is the enlightened few who carry the burden. The intense power for good inherent in the medium is not fully realized, a situation demanding a more courageous attitude on the part of the public, the commercial world and the local authority.



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## WRITING AND REALIZATION

By

MEYER LEVIN

It takes only a few minutes to write a scene in which a runaway boy wakes up on a high rocky ledge in Palestine, to find himself surrounded by sheep, with an Arab shepherd staring at him.

But when you go to make the scene, in precisely the spot you had in mind when you wrote it, you discover that the equipment-truck can only go within a few hundred yards of the rocks because the driver does not want to risk his vehicle on a ploughed field. You help lug the camera equipment the rest of the way. The shepherd who was to be there at four o'clock with the sheep is found in a meadow a mile away at four o'clock, because he says his sheep could not feed on the rocks. You push and goad the sheep, but by the time they reach the scene the cameraman decides that the light is on the hairline of departure. There may be time for just one take. Then it is discovered that the sheep simply will not stay on the rocky ledge long enough for a take. They scramble away. Finally you make the scene without the sheep.

But it isn't what you wrote. At night, worrying about it, you suddenly realize that the scene was

wrongly written. It should have been goats. So the next day you decide to try it with goats.

Although there are goatherds all over the mountainside, there are none within four miles of this particular spot on the day you want them. You go to Tiberius and personally lift a sufficient number of goats on to the truck. You transport them. You help herd them up the hill. And after a few dozen major and minor crises, and hours of toil as a goatherd, Arab-pacifier, reflector-holder and assistant camera boy, you get the scene that was so easy to write.

The French have a word for it. They call it *realization*.

The realization of *Survivors*, in Palestine, was a six-month try to catch a dawn shot, scarcely an evening that wasn't spent desperately hunting for a character for tomorrow's scene, because the one who had been cast had been called away by his Youth Group for a 'hike'. Every word that was innocently typed in the script, which was written in six weeks 'from scratch', later entailed laborious hours of realization. And yet, as the writer, I could not permit myself to feel that the

final responsibility of realization could rest entirely with someone else.

In a studio set-up, it is simple for the writer to say that what he wrote was beautiful, but that after the script departed from his hands any number of people mangled and butchered it far beyond recognition. While this is usually true, there are surely times when every writer in his soul smiles at the task he has given the producers and directors, knowing that what he has so easily written is most difficult to realize, and inwardly glad that he does not have to take the responsibility for putting it on the screen.

Conversely, and more often, the writer aches with the apprehension that what he has written cannot exactly and precisely be understood, through the words themselves; he feels that any realizer, however talented, is bound to get the atmosphere or the emphasis wrong, and knows that the only true way to make films is for the writer to be present throughout the shooting and to have at least as much control as anyone else in the realization.

Few writers ever get such an opportunity. But with the increasing trend toward story-documentary technique, stimulated by the successful experiments produced during the war, these opportunities are increasing. And when Herbert Kline and I set out to make our Palestine film, it was agreed that this was to be the method. I would assume equal production responsibility and have equal production authority with him. He would direct the film, but the realization had to conform to the intention of the script.

As it worked out in practice, Kline acted as my producer while I was writing the script, I acted as his producer while he was directing the film.

It need not be imagined that this procedure is perfect and that it always works harmoniously. Nor does it mean that each takes responsibility for the merits of the other's work. In the end, the writing stands on its own and the direction stands on its own. But although the French often use the word *realization* in the same way that we use the word *direction*, it reflects only their over-emphasis on the role of the director of films, for the realization in this type of film is truly the work of both, and I believe that writers may justifiably insist that it is part of their function in all film-making to have such a share in realization.

As joint producers we decided from the beginning that in the case of severely disputed scenes, where we could arrive at no agreement as to the method of filming, we would film both versions and decide which to use when we saw what they looked like on the screen. It became necessary to do this in only three or four instances.

To the making of *Survivors*, I brought a continuing interest in Palestine that had begun with my first visit to the country in 1925. I had also

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specialized, as a war correspondent, in the story of the fate of the Jews of Europe. The film, Kline and I agreed, was to show what Palestine could do for the survivors.

Kline brought to the project his experience as a story-documentary producer, being especially known for *The Forgotten Village*. But each of us had worked in the other's field, for he had collaborated on screenwriting assignments, while I had worked as a documentary film director in OWI.

Having agreed upon the theme of the story, there followed a consideration of what had to go into the story. During all my years of contact with Palestine I had collected 'must' scenes for a film about the country. On every one of my four previous trips I had discovered some view, or some activity, which I felt must eventually go into the film. And I had, in fact, first proposed the idea of a Palestine film to Kline in Spain in 1937; we had never quite let the subject drop.

I knew, for instance, that the story must show what life was like in a Palestine farm collective; it must include a *horra*—the settlers' dance—and it must include an *aliyah*—the going up to the site of a new colony, which is collectively built in a single day. It must include an illegal landing. It must include the view of the wilderness of Judea and the Dead Sea from Jerusalem-Jericho road. It must include the view of the Emek from the Haifa road. It must, of course, include the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan. It had to contain a sequence that could be played on the campus of the Hebrew University, with the awesome background of the Dead Sea on one side and the spiritual view of Jerusalem on the opposite side of Mount Scopus.

The film-story would have to make an opportunity for a sequence in the old city of Jerusalem; it would have to make use of the complex traditions and emotions that were attached to the sights of the Via Dolorosa and of the dark lanes and huddled synagogues of the old city; it would have to show the progressive force and spirit of the new city, too.

And apart from all the physically obligatory scenes, the places that had to be in the picture because of their beauty, or their historic and spiritual connection, there were the mandatory requirements of the life in the country. Something of the cultural life had to be shown, through the city of Tel Aviv—perhaps the theatres or the symphony orchestra. Something of the industrial life of the country had to come into the story, either showing the manufacturing complex in Haifa harbour, or perhaps the diamond industry of Nathanyah, or the potash works of the Dead Sea.

And finally, the pioneering aspects of land reclamation had to come into any story of Palestine, and for this, the new drive toward settling the desert of the Negev was the obvious answer.

Plainly, there were enough 'must' items for the construction of a full-length documentary film. If we could hope to get them all in, we needed a story of movement—a chase, or a search.

Usually, writers feel that the inclusion of obligatory scenes hampers them. But sometimes one feels these scenes as a challenge to invention. And since in this case most of the requirements had originated with myself, there could be no complaint.

In the end they were all solved, through the

story of a boy's search for his family. The central motif of the story echoed in my mind from the story of every survivor I had met in the liberated camps and on the roads of Europe, during and immediately after the war. The first and consuming quest of each was for the remnants of his family. Indeed, I somewhat caught their obsession, and for many weeks almost dropped my work as a journalist in order to collect lists of survivors, with the names of the kin they hoped to find and spread these lists wherever they might be useful.

One story emerged from the rest. It was the story of a little boy in Buchenwald who refused to leave the camp when liberation came because his father had been at the camp with him and his father, when taken away on a work-party, had told the child 'don't go away from here—wait here for me until I come back. Otherwise we will never find each other'.

This became transmuted into the story of a child whose father, when being taken away with the rest of the family on a deportation train, told the child to run and hide in the woods, 'you will find us in Palestine'.

The child then arrives in Palestine with a group landed illegally by the Hagana; from the first moment he reveals his obsession that he will find his family in Palestine. As the group is taken, by truck, to a settlement in lower Galilee it becomes possible, by following the truck, to disclose such views as Mount Tabor in the pre-dawn and the Sea of Galilee in dawn.

The life of a typical settlement is revealed as the refugees begin to adjust themselves to their new home, and as the children try to befriend the boy, David. But he rebuffs them, and runs away in search of his own family.

David trades an army jack-knife for a ride on an Arab boy's donkey, and through their runaway episode we see more details of the shores of Galilee and the life of the region. The relationship between David and the Arab boy, and between the settlement and the Arab boy's village, serves in a most natural way to illustrate the typical workaday relationships on the ground level, between Arabs and Jews.

The runaway episode is halted when the donkey gives birth to a foal; the boys are brought back home and David is given the foal. But as it cries for its mother, he carries it back, wading across the Jordan which is between the Jewish settlement and the Arab village. Later, it is decided at a meeting of the settlement that David shall be sent to a children's village, where he will be among other boys like himself, with a chance for special care toward adjustment.

This time in the daylight, the truck passes on the Haifa road, through the Emek, past oil refineries; it stops in Haifa, where David learns that a ship of legal immigrants is entering the port; he hopes to find someone from his family on the ship.

After his further disappointment in the port, the story progresses to the children's village; on the

(Continued on page 148)

## THE UNIT WITHIN

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first night he quarrels with the boys who insist he is an orphan like all the rest of them, he has a fight and runs away again.

Through means of this flight, it is possible to show glimpses of Arab shepherd life, and of Caesaria, and finally of the new city of Tel Aviv. Here he is led to seek his family amongst the members of the Palestine Philharmonic orchestra, for one of the violinists bears David's family name, Halevi.

David interrupts a rehearsal, where a new Palestine folk symphony is being performed. But the violinist is not from David's country—Poland. However, someone knows of a Halevi from Poland, working at the Dead Sea potash plant.

Again the boy's journey leads through a section of unforgettable Palestine landscape—this time as he rides a bus down the Jericho road. He passes through the potash works, where Jews and Arabs labour side by side and finds Yehuda Halevi; the worker pretends to be his uncle.

As the boy begins to find himself at home with the Halevis, the life of the community is felt—the Sabbath by the Dead Sea, the visit to the neighbouring settlement, the chatter of Palestinian children about their vast projects for electrifying and irrigating the country.

But when David discovers that Halevi is not really his uncle he runs away for the last time—to find the office in Jerusalem where, he has heard, there is a record of all the families that have been found. On his journey through the wilderness, he is helped by an Arab merchant who takes the boy to Jerusalem on his camel-train. They enter by the Gate of St Stephen. The boy becomes lost in the maze of the old city and is helped by two priests who find him on the Via Dolorosa. They take him to his own people in the Jewish quarter. (Here, we deliberately avoided the Wailing Wall.) The boy enters a synagogue and from there is directed to the new city.

With a troop of children masquerading for Purim, he at last finds the 'office where they have the names'. This Search Bureau for Missing Relatives is actually housed under an ancient ruin, between the new and old cities and the long files of family-records, in the catacombs, provide a perfect background for the climatic moment when David discovers that his family is dead.

In his collapse, he has a reversion to infancy. He is taken to the Haddassah hospital on Mount Scopus and there his friends from the first settlement find him. In his phase of infancy he identi-

fies the refugee woman who has befriended him and the leader of the settlement Hagana as 'mamma' and 'papa'.

This moment fuses the story of the child with the story of the refugee woman and her problem is revealed in the following scene, which takes place on the campus of the Hebrew University, adjacent to the hospital.

The story moves on to the establishment of a new colony in the Negev by the refugees, together with a Palestinian youth group. The child is brought to the settlement.

In ploughing, a stone is turned up bearing an ancient inscription with the name Halevi. Through this incident the boy is brought back to reality, in this symbol he finds his family.

The course of this story provided the inclusion of all the self-imposed obligatory scenes, and yet provided this in such a way that every setting added to the dramatic potential of the tale.

While it was the director's task to realize the scenes in terms of acting, the finding of the precise locations and the enlistment of the people of each place for authentic background usually fell to the writer. Partly, this was due to my working knowledge of Hebrew and partly to my long familiarity with the country and with Jewish customs. For though the film was made with English-speaking participants the work in the entourage was usually conducted in Hebrew.

While all of Palestine was extremely excited by our film project, and more than ready to co-operate, the very intensity of interest sometimes caused difficulties. For the smallest participant wanted to be sure that our point of view was acceptable and every scene was scrupulously investigated. As the population is intelligent and hyper-sensitive this often led to delays and to discussions and explanations which would seem tryingly protracted under ordinary circumstances. In addition to allaying the suspicion of the political groups and of the Arabs, there were difficulties of tradition to overcome.

My script for instance envisaged a scene in a synagogue in the Old City. Now, almost all orthodox Jews consider photography as forbidden under the command not to make graven images. How could one 'realize' such a scene?

I found the leader of the old-city community and got him to show me an ancient, beautiful, little synagogue behind his own house. It was named, he told me, the Ohr Chayim—the Living

Light. It so happens that I wrote a book of Chassidic tales some years ago and knew that the Ohr Chayim was one of the great rabbis of that mystical sect.

This communion of information, coming from an unorthodox American Jew, was the opening point. We discussed Chassidism for hours. And finally we were permitted to film our scene in the holiest of Old City synagogues.

In the completed film there are, of course, many things which I feel might have been different, and many things which the director feels might have been different, had there been fewer practical difficulties—such as the curfew, which usually struck as we had finished three hours of preparations and were ready to film. But these are the limitations of the method of shooting in live locations; in return you get the quality of life.

As a writer, I believe the labour I put in for six months, after the six weeks I spent in writing the script, was necessary for the fulfilment of an author's responsible share in the realization of this type of film. The goats are among the rocks—even if I had to carry them there myself.

## CORRESPONDENCE

DEAR SIR,

With reference to your reviewer's comments on my book *British Film Music*, may I correct him on two points of fact? First, I did not say that the GPO Unit became known as Crown Film Unit in 1939: (Page 106 . . . 'Although the name was not altered until some months after the outbreak of World War II, the GPO Unit became in effect the Crown Film Unit a few hours after Premier Neville Chamberlain had announced the fateful news that Britain was at war . . .')

Secondly, in the case of the film *October Man*, Kenneth Pakeman wrote three short pieces of music before the film went into production for use in the film; subsequently, the music was not used in the final version and William Alwyn was called in to provide the entire score for the picture.

I have to thank the reviewer for his correction in the case of *Siricken Peninsula*.

JOHN HUNTLEY

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